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## Book Review: Kingdom Through Covenant

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involves the Father's removing us from Christ should the condition of faith no longer remain. Such a state is irremediable (Num 15:30; Heb 6:4–6; 10:26). Storms charges, "if you believe that born-again Christians can apostatize and lose their salvation, you must embrace the doctrine of 'twice lost, always lost' ... because Hebrews 6 says it is impossible to renew them to repentance" (p. 114). This is precisely the point, making it all the more urgent. If, however, Storms maintains that there are some unbelievers who "have come so very close to true conversion but then have hardened their hearts to such a degree that when they finally turn away from Christ, God simply lets them go" (pp. 114–15), then he must also embrace the doctrine of resistible grace.

Storms is to be commended for bringing this important subject of theological inquiry to the table once again. In light of his stated goal to convince Arminians of their error, however, I am disappointed by his failure to engage Arminianism on a serious level. This would have been a most welcomed and beneficial enterprise for all interested parties. Yet *Kept for Jesus* in the main preaches to the choir. Most citations are from likeminded authors (esp. Piper), with little awareness of Arminian perspectives. His monolithic casting of Arminianism is surprising, since he has elsewhere reviewed J. Matthew Pinson's edited book, *Four Views on Eternal Security* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), which distinguishes Reformed and Wesleyan Arminianism. His intention to engage convincingly is laudable, but nevertheless unrealized.

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*Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants.* By Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012, 848 pp., \$32.99.

Over the course of the last century much ink has been spilt over the divide that exists between covenant theology and dispensationalism. While copious amounts of discussion, disagreement, and modification have taken place, a gap still looms between these two theological systems. Seemingly, one can seldom delve into particular theological issues—baptism, the Israel/Church relationship, the work of Christ, details regarding last things, etc.—without detailing their particular stance regarding these two systems of thought. And so it has been for a number of generations; dialogue at a seeming impasse in some respects. However, discussion has begun afresh with the publication of *Kingdom through Covenant*, by Gentry and Wellum, and this is so due to their proposal of a *via media* between covenant theology on the one hand, and dispensationalism on the other (p. 12).

Gentry and Wellum both teach at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the former in the area of OT, the latter as professor of Christian Theology. There is, seemingly, a building momentum generated from such a publication to revisit this crucial conversation relating to exegesis and theological method. This is evidenced not merely by the publication of this book, but also the numerous lengthy reviews that have responded to their proposal. Also, there is a recent abridged version of

Gentry and Wellum's tome, entitled *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, as well as a future publication entitled *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*. This latter work continues to develop the insights of *Kingdom through Covenant* by a team of scholars who accept the basic biblical-theological framework of Gentry and Wellum and develop that framework in areas that the initial book did not (e.g. Sabbath, warning passages, circumcision, land, relationship of the Law to the Christian). The present review will seek to keep these various publications and reviews in mind, but the central focus will be on their primary work *Kingdom through Covenant*.

From the outset Gentry and Wellum make clear that they aim to demonstrate two crucial ideas: first, the centrality of the covenants in forming the backbone of the biblical metanarrative, and, second, how a number of crucial theological differences can arise based on the way one treats the covenants' relationship to one another (p. 21). The authors believe that correctly "putting together" the biblical covenants is central to doing accurate biblical and systematic theology. As they believe covenant theology and dispensationalism do not put the covenants together in quite the right way, they offer a mediating position. Their proposal, entitled "kingdom through covenant," encapsulates their attempt to make "better sense of the overall presentation of Scripture, which, in the end, will help us resolve some of our theological differences" (p. 23).

This work is divided between the two authors, Gentry dealing with the close exegesis of key texts relating to the covenants, Wellum focusing on theological formulation and entailments. The prolegomena (chaps. 1–3) is written by Wellum. Within this section he addresses the significance of all of the biblical covenants for both biblical and systematic theology. He then gives a description of the two theological systems that have made use of the covenants, namely, covenant theology and dispensationalism. Wellum gives a fair description of each system, noting varying positions (e.g. classical, revised, and progressive dispensationalism) and typically citing key proponents of each. After describing and contrasting these systems, he alludes to where the rest of the book is going in terms of the *via media* known as "kingdom through covenant."

Thus, in chapter 3, Wellum delves into key hermeneutical issues in putting the covenants together in "biblical manner" (i.e. one that takes seriously what Scripture claims to be and interprets it in light of what it actually is as God's unfolding revelation across time; p. 83). After citing Scripture's character as the Word of God, Wellum cites the work of Richard Lints (*The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology*) and asserts that in the interpretation of Scripture, one must consider three horizons: textual (i.e. immediate context), epochal (i.e. location in redemptive history), and canonical (i.e. reading the Bible as unified whole; pp. 93–100). Wellum concludes, "the best way to read Scripture and to draw theological conclusions is to interpret a given text of Scripture in its linguistic-historical, literary, redemptive-historical, and canonical contexts" (p. 100). No doubt the best interpreters of covenant theology and dispensationalism would agree with such an approach, but the difference, Wellum contends, is in the way one unfolds the covenants as it relates to the promise-fulfillment motif. This relates directly to typology

and how the covenants and their signs point forward to Christ. Wellum briefly states his understanding of how typology works across the covenants, but it is here that this work differs from covenant and dispensational theology: "This observation that we, as the church, are the 'Israel of God' only by virtue of our union with Christ, who is the antitypical fulfillment of Israel, is crucial for carving a *via media* between dispensationalism's and covenant theology's view of the church" (p. 106 n. 55).

With this in mind, Wellum highlights two key areas of disagreement (while also noting a number of agreements) between their view and those of dispensationalism and covenant theology, respectively. For the former category, the authors believe understanding the covenants typologically and in relation to one another means that the land promise made to Israel in the OT is fulfilled in Christ, because he is the fulfillment of the covenants, and also points forward to the new heavens and new earth. This is in contradistinction to dispensationalism's claim that the land promise will be fulfilled to ethnic Israel in the millennium. With regard to covenant theology, the authors aver that the "genealogical principle"—viewing the church as a mixed community (i.e. with both believers and non-believers) as Israel was—is wrong-headed due to the progression of the covenants, and especially the newness of the new covenant. All the people of that covenant will know the Lord, from the least to the greatest (Jer. 31:31–34). These two areas get at the heart of the respective systems, and it is here that Gentry and Wellum show the real takeaway that comes from adopting their system as opposed to the other two.

Part two, the longest section of the book, looks in detail at specific exposition of (mainly) OT texts that frame their overall discussion. Together these chapters (4–15) address the major covenants of the Bible, including the Adamic/creation covenant along with the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and new covenants. Although Gentry begins with the Noahic covenant as essentially a reestablishment of the Adamic covenant, in summarizing the flow of the covenants, the summary of this section will begin with the covenant made with Adam. Being made in the *image* of God denotes Adam's role as "servant-king" over God's world. Being the *likeness* of God emphasizes Adam's relationship to God as a son. In sum, the *likeness* concept emphasizes man's relationship to God while *image* focuses on man's relationship to creation. The Garden of Eden was the place where Adam and God dwelled together, and it functioned as an archetypal sacred place or sanctuary. Adam's role was to rule and subdue the earth and thus expand the sacred space throughout God's creation. With his sin and fall, though, Adam (as representative of mankind) failed in the mission given to him by God. The Noahic covenant was not a brand-new covenant but a continuation in some ways of the creation covenant made with Adam. As a second Adam, Noah was to succeed where Adam failed. But he did not succeed. Thus, the search for a faithful covenant adherent would continue. In regards to the Abrahamic covenant, "God intends to establish his rule over all creation through his relationship with Abram and his family: kingdom through covenant." Through Abram and his descendants "the broken relationship between God and all the nations of the world will be reconciled and healed" (p. 245). The land promised to Abraham is to function as a new Eden.

Through Moses and the covenant made with Israel, the nation picks up the mantle of the new Adam. Israel was to be the mediator between God and the world, “a vehicle for bringing the nations to the divine presence and rule” (p. 322). Israel was to dwell in God’s presence and mediate his glory as a kingdom of priests through the appropriation of the Law. The next new Adam was David via Abraham and Israel. Like Adam, David is God’s son and like Adam, David was to mediate God’s blessings on a universal scale. The Davidic covenant which was given to him had the purpose of being “the instruction for humanity” (2 Sam 7:19), indicating that the covenant’s aim was universal blessing. Yet the record shows that both David and his descendants were sinful and failed. Finally, the covenants climax in the giving of the new covenant. With the new covenant, the baton of “new Adam” is then passed to the Davidic Messiah whom we now know as Jesus. He is the one who restores Israel for the good of the world. While all of the other “Adams” failed—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David—Jesus the Davidic Messiah succeeds. As the typological fulfillment, Wellum summarizes the storyline in this way: “It is only if God himself, as the covenant maker and keeper, unilaterally acts to keep his own promise through the provision of a faithful covenant partner that a new and better covenant can be established” (p. 611).

The work ends with the third section dealing with theological integration of the previous exegetical insights (chaps. 16–17). Here Wellum gives a biblical-theological summary of the overarching picture of their theological systems, and also highlights theological implications in relation to Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. The book ends with a lexical analysis of *bērīt*.

On the whole, one must note that this work is a substantial contribution to biblical and theological studies, addressing a frequently held discussion regarding how the whole Bible hangs together. The authors state that in order to understand the Scripture, one needs to understand the biblical covenants (pp. 12–13). Furthermore, each covenant should be interpreted in context and “then viewed intertextually and canonically” (p. 14). The goal is to understand each covenant, how the covenants relate to each other, and how they inform the canonical narrative. This is a commendable goal, in thinking through the centrality of the covenants in a hermeneutical sense, and again the authors do an excellent job of advancing the discussion. The book offers a wealth of exegetical analysis and interacts with a select range of scholarly interpretations of biblical texts treating the divine covenants. In this sense it is truly a comprehensive treatment.

This work also does an excellent job in its treatment of covenant theology, noting the realities of the “newness” found in the new covenant and how this affects the way in which one speaks of the people of God. Perhaps one of the best critiques coming from the side of covenant theology comes from the pen of Michael Horton (<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/kingdom-through-covenant-a-review-by-michael-horton>). Horton presses on the reality of the new covenant and the people of God, saying that Jeremiah 31:34 simply means “all without distinction” when referring to the fact that they will all know the Lord. In a response to the review by Horton, Gentry and Wellum rightly contend that this makes sense if one assumes that the nature of Israel and the church is basically the

same, but it does not do justice to the significant number of texts that speak of new covenant members as not only those who know the Lord but also those who experience forgiveness of sins, have the Spirit, are joined to Christ, and are thus part of a community that is unlike the previous community (Jer. 31:31–34). As we come to the NT, this prophetic expectation is precisely what we see as Christ's people are described as those who have been brought from death to life, born and indwelt by the Spirit, united to Christ and thus justified, adopted, and sanctified in him. It is hard to apply these truths to those who do not claim to experience these new covenant realities (<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/gentry-and-wellum-respond-to-kingdom-through-covenant-reviews>). The exegetical rigor supporting these points is crucial to note, and it gives strong contention for a robust Baptist theology on this point.

More questions can be raised about issues of consistency when the authors seek to refute certain features of (progressive) dispensationalism. The major challenge to dispensationalism resides in this theological system distinguishing between Israel and the church too greatly by preserving promises (most specifically regarding the land) to Israel apart from the church. The idea of a future land promise that will be realized for Israel is rather to be seen as realized in Jesus and his victory on behalf of the world, because land is a type for a much larger promise of God (for further thoughts on the land in keeping with Gentry and Wellum's argument, see Oren Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God's Redemptive Plan*). In relation to this argument, one area of critique raised by virtually every reviewer of this book is the lack of substantial attention given to NT exegesis, particularly a text such as Romans 9–11. Wellum and Gentry contend that dealing thoroughly with the NT would require another book, and, more substantively, "*within the OT itself*, the anticipation of the new covenant is already bringing the changes that the NT then announces and develops" (<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/gentry-and-wellum-respond-to-kingdom-through-covenant-reviews>; italics original). As such, attention given to the OT is warranted, and it also seems the NT will be more of an emphasis in the forthcoming work, *Progressive Covenantalism*.

However, as it relates to the land promise given to Israel, some further details are worth noting. Gentry and Wellum respond to a review by Darrell Bock, who maintains that the land promise must be fulfilled to ethnic Israel in the millennial age lest one undermine God's faithfulness to Israel: "Let us be clear: we do maintain a future for ethnic Israel, but that future is not as DT [dispensational theology] conceives it. Instead it is found in a massive end-time salvation of ethnic Jews brought to faith in their Messiah (Rom. 9–11) and then incorporated into the one new man, the church (Eph. 2:11–22). This is the true hope for Israel that Scripture holds out in all of his glory and grace" (<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/gentry-and-wellum-respond-to-kingdom-through-covenant-reviews>). Thus, Gentry and Wellum maintain a future for ethnic Israel, as stated in Romans 11, but more could also be said about the land promise. Their argument is that the land promise is taken up in the biblical story in a type escalation from Eden to the land of Israel to the new earth, such that the land comes to be replaced (fulfilled) by the new earth. The new earth, then, takes the place of the land promised to Israel in the

consummation. However, as Craig Blaising argues in a review of this work, the fact that the land serves as a type of blessing to be extended to the earth does not logically call for the elimination or annihilation of that land in the renewal process. The renewal of the land and the renewal of the whole earth go together in biblical thought. The claim that there will be no future fulfillment of the territorial promise given to Israel is sometimes supported by the thought that the NT never mentions the land *per se*. This is incorrect, as Paul's statement in Acts 13:19 is too often overlooked: "After destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them [this people Israel; v.17] their land as an inheritance." The phrase is taken from covenant language in Deuteronomy (4:21, 38; 12:10; 15:4; 19:10, 14; 21:23; 24:4; 25:19). In particular, Deuteronomy 4 is a crucial text speaking of a future exile and restoration of Israel (parallel to chap. 30). It is instructive that the repeated reference of the gift of the land as an inheritance is supplemented by the phrase "the land that the Lord your God is giving you for all time" (Deut. 4:40). The gift of the land as an inheritance is linked to the everlasting covenant promise in Ps 105:7–11. Moreover Paul, who says that God gave them their land as an inheritance, is the same Paul who says in Roman 11:29 that "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable." It seems that at least one of those "gifts" is the land, as it is repeatedly spoken of in the OT as a gift of the Lord to Israel: "the land that the Lord gave you" (e.g. Josh. 1:15). In this same context (Romans 11), Paul speaks of the restoration of Israel in accordance with the covenant promise. The NT does not dwell on the land promise because it was not really a matter of dispute. The matter of dispute in NT writings was whether Jesus was the Christ. That was the main point in Paul's synagogue speech in Acts 13, where he does mention the gift of the land to Israel as an inheritance (<http://www.tms.edu/m/msj26h.pdf>).

This and several other arguments made by others in the progressive dispensational camp should be considered. This, however, does not detract from the real advancements made by such a work to the discussion of the biblical covenants, typology, and the way in which the whole Bible comes together cohesively. Due to its technical nature, particularly in the exegetical chapters, the audience will be somewhat limited to scholars, seminary students, and pastors who have their Hebrew in good working order. In the call for the authors to be "biblical" in one's theology, this work offers a challenge for those in biblical and theological studies to strive for scholarship filled with acumen and rigor.

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*Christ Crucified: Understanding the Atonement.* By Donald Macleod. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014, 272 pp., \$22.00 paper.

Macleod's book is one of a spate of publications defending penal substitution to appear in the last two years or so. It is a book of elegantly simple biblical scholarship, combined with theological comprehensiveness and oozing of reverence and worshipful wonder at the cross. Macleod was professor and chair of systematic